



# State Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

The Missoula Organization of REALTORS® advocates for REALTORS® and consumers. Our members would like to know your thoughts on priority REALTOR® issues. We thank you for being specific in your responses.

## **ISSUES**

Home prices in Missoula County have increased rapidly since the end of the economic downturn and incomes have not kept up. The median sales price of a home in 2019 was \$315,000, making it challenging for many Missoulian's to buy a home. The rapidly increasing price is due in part to a shortage of housing, particularly in more attainable price ranges. As a state legislator, you will evaluate policies that will impact housing and economic development in Missoula County.

### **Housing Development**

State law broadly outlines the process by which local governments must review subdivisions of land. Subdivision is the primary vehicle for creating lots to be developed into homes for sale. Subdivision review policies attempt to balance communities' housing needs with protecting the environment, agriculture, wildlife habitat, public safety, and other interests. **What changes to Subdivision law do you support to encourage needed development of housing while balancing other community values?**

Like most government tools these days, the problem with subdivision review is not the policy tool itself. The problem is that political parties use subdivision review to accomplish political goals. In Missoula's case, subdivision review is used to artificially limit housing supply and control the location of approved housing construction. I support making simplifying the review process, making it cheaper and faster and limiting governments ability to abuse it to artificially control supply itself. Allowing the market to dictate supply as needed.

Regulatory reform may be one strategy for promoting housing affordability through state law. **Are there non-regulatory strategies that the legislature should pursue, so please enumerate? If strategies require funding, where should it come from?**

Along the same lines as subdivision review, I think that regulation should be used for its proper purpose, making sure that everything is above board. If we limit governments ability to abuse regulation to control outcomes according to ideological goal's I think that takes care of the majority of our problems. To me that means simply limiting regulations and regulatory authority.

### **Tax Law**

State Law provides for tax increment financing (TIF) and urban renewal districts. TIF is used within urban renewal districts to combat blight and promote economic development.

However, critics of TIF say that these urban renewal districts can be in place for many years, and TIF diverts property tax revenue away from schools and county governments. Supporters respond that TIF grows the property tax base and creates jobs, and that once the urban renewal districts sunset, the taxing jurisdictions have significantly more revenue than they would have otherwise had. **What changes to TIF statues would you recommend responding citizen complaints and improve the program?**

Property taxes are the primary revenue generator used to fund local government services. Recently increased mil levies multiplied by increasing property value assessments have left many homeowners asking for relief. **What are your thoughts on the current taxation structure for local government? What changes, if any, would you propose/support?**

TIF as originally envisioned is an important tool allowing local government to help modernize aging community infrastructure. I would like to see it returned to that purpose instead of being used for weird pet projects. The length of time that a TIF or Urban Renewal District can exist has to actually be enforced so that communities can actually regain the property tax base for local schools. We need to reconnect decisions made by unelected boards to elected officials so voters can hold people accountable for decisions being made and we need to flesh out the definition of “blight” to prevent local government from abusing TIF’s original purpose for weird projects. I plan to bring bills for all of these things in the next session and look forward to working with MOR to put them together and get them passed.

### **Economic Development**

While the unemployment rate in Montana has been quite low for several years prior to the COVID pandemic, growth in wages has remained relatively stagnant compared to increases in housing costs. **As a state legislator, how would you propose to help grow and attract good paying jobs in Montana and specifically Missoula County?**

In Missoula we have a weird confluence of several bad policy decisions that artificially hurts our economic development. Local government in Missoula never stops wanting to grow artificially beyond its tax base, and the only real way that local government can grow outside of its tax base is to raise property taxes and fees. We also have a bad habit of artificially limiting housing supply in order to control where growth takes place in the county. Because we continuously raise taxes and fees, the price of property and business operation remains artificially high. That makes it harder to afford a house in Missoula and makes it more expensive to start/maintain a business in Missoula. This leaves less revenue for businesses to use to reinvest either in the business itself or raises for their employees. Controlling tax and spending policy and preventing abuse of these policy tools would alleviate the majority of these problems as outside of us cutting off our nose despite our face, Montana is very well positioned for strong economic growth as shown by pre-pandemic indicators.

### **Fair Housing**

The National Association of REALTORS include sexual orientation and gender identity anti-discrimination language in their code of ethics. Montana does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and /or gender identity. **As a state legislator would you support legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and /or gender identity?**

I oppose discrimination of any kind. The problem here like in most policy areas is the wording itself and making sure that we are prohibiting discrimination while protecting individual and property rights. An employee should be judged on their work, an applicant should be judged on their work background and ethic.